United Nations DP/FPA/2014/7

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services

Distr.: General
15 April 2014

Original: English

Annual session 2014
23 to 27 June 2014, Geneva
Item 11 of the provisional agenda
UNFPA – Evaluation

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

ANNUAL REPORT ON EVALUATION

Report of the Director, Evaluation Office

Summary

This report reviews the evaluation function at UNFPA for the 2012-2013 biennium. The report contains information on: (a) human and financial resources dedicated to evaluation at UNFPA; (b) the progress made to build evaluation capacity within the organization; (c) the key findings and lessons learned from corporate evaluations finalized in 2012-2013; and (d) actions undertaken to facilitate the use of evaluation at UNFPA. The report has been prepared during a period of transition, due to the adoption of a revised UNFPA evaluation policy and the creation of an independent Evaluation Office in 2013. The report also highlights the main challenges and prospects for evaluation at UNFPA.

Elements of a decision

Elements of a decision are contained in section X of the report.

14-30057 (E) 230414

Please recycle

Contents

Page

I. Introduction 3
II. The evaluation function at UNFPA: human and financial resources 3
A. Human resources 3
B. Financial resources 5
III. Building evaluation capacity in UNFPA 6
IV. UNFPA corporate evaluations in 2012-2013 7
A. Thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health, 2000-2011 8
B. Joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on female genital mutilation and cutting 9
C. Evaluation of the sixth programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Madagascar 9
V. UNFPA country programme evaluations 10
VI. Evaluation use and learning 12
VII. UNFPA evaluation partnerships 13
A. Working with national partners 14
B. United Nations Evaluation Group 14
C. United Nations system-wide action plan for gender equality 14
VIII. UNFPA evaluation: a period of transition 15
IX. Looking forward: challenges and prospects for evaluation at UNFPA 15
X. Elements of a decision 16

List of tables

Table 1: Decentralized evaluation support capacity in 2013 4
Table 2: Overview of financial resources, 2012-2013 5
Table 3: Quality of country programme evaluation reports in 2012-2013 and 2010-2011 11
Table 4: Decentralized evaluations, 2014-2015 16

List of annexes*

*Annexes are available on the UNFPA Executive Board web page at: https://executiveboard.unfpa.org/execDoc.unfpa?method=docDetail&year=2014&sessionType=AS

Annex 1: Corporate evaluations, 2012-2013: progress in implementation
Annex 2: Completion dates of country programme evaluations
Annex 3: 2013 evaluation quality assessments: overall assessment summaries

I. Introduction

1. This report assesses the evaluation function at UNFPA for the 2012-2013 biennium. It also: (a) provides details of UNFPA corporate and country programme evaluations carried out during 2012-2013; (b) outlines the main findings and recommendations of four completed UNFPA corporate evaluations; and (c) provides an overview of UNFPA evaluation resources, capacity and information on evaluation partnerships.

2. The year 2013 was a turning point for the evaluation function at UNFPA. The year saw: (a) the review of the 2009 UNFPA evaluation policy;[1] (b) the adoption of a revised UNFPA evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5); and (c) the creation of an independent Evaluation Office. The revised evaluation policy reflects efforts over the past two years to strengthen evaluation capacity throughout UNFPA. Key improvements include: (a) the production of good quality corporate evaluations; (b) support mechanisms to improve the quality of programme-level evaluations; and (c) efforts to promote greater transparency and use of evaluation findings. The revised policy provides a strong foundation to enable evaluation to play a significant role in the work of UNFPA, to improve the quality, credibility and use of evaluations to better contribute to organizational learning and accountability.

II. The evaluation function at UNFPA: human and financial resources

A. Human resources

3. As of 31 December 2013, the Evaluation Office had seven approved posts: six at the professional level and one at the general service level. At the end of 2013, all of the approved professional posts were encumbered.

4. Until July 2013, the Evaluation Branch had six staff members. With the establishment of the Evaluation Office on 1 July 2013, an additional position of director was created.[2] The Director, Division for Oversight Services, served as the Director, ad interim, of the Evaluation Office, until the appointment of the new Director of the Evaluation Office, who joined UNFPA in January 2014. Five staff members of the Evaluation Office are female, including the Director.[3]

5. At regional and country office levels, monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points provide decentralized evaluation support in UNFPA (table 1). Approximately 38 per cent of UNFPA country offices have dedicated monitoring and evaluation officers,

[1] DP/FPA/2009/4 – The evaluation policy is available at http://www.unfpa.org/exbrd/2009/annual_session/eval_policy.doc.

[2] The Evaluation Office was created in July 2013, thus marking the separation of the Evaluation Branch from the Division for Oversight Services. For the sake of clarity, hereafter the evaluation entity at UNFPA for the period under review (2012-2013) is referred to as the Evaluation Office.

[3] In 2012-2013, 73 per cent of consultants that the Evaluation Office hired to assist in carrying out corporate evaluations were female.

who are responsible for monitoring activities and for evaluation-related tasks. Sixty-two per cent of UNFPA country offices have a professional post that functions as a focal point for monitoring and evaluation. The broad span of these roles has implications for the amount of time that staff members are able to devote to different activities, and on the balance of expertise and capacity required to meet programming, monitoring and evaluation needs. The recruitment of monitoring and evaluation officers with evaluation expertise in the principal programme areas of UNFPA is a challenge for many UNFPA country offices.

6. Staffing capacity at the country level is a concern, as UNFPA seeks to strengthen evaluation capacity, improve the quality and credibility of evaluations, and improve evaluation use and learning. All six UNFPA regional offices have substantive monitoring and evaluation adviser posts. These posts provide support and guidance to UNFPA country offices in the design, management and use of evaluation.

7. The regional monitoring and evaluation adviser posts play an important role with the Evaluation Office in relation to centrally managed corporate evaluations and evaluation capacity-building. Several of these posts are under recruitment due to retirement, staff movements and, in the case of West and Central Africa, the creation of a new post in the new regional office. UNFPA has undertaken a number of initiatives to strengthen human resource capacity in evaluation; sections III and VII of this report provide further details.

Table 1 - Decentralized evaluation support capacity in 2013

	UNFPA global	**East and Southern Africa**	**West and Central Africa**	**Arab States**	**Asia and the Pacific**	**Eastern Europe and Central Asia**	**Latin America and the Caribbean**
Monitoring and evaluation advisers in regional offices	6	1	1	1	1	1	1
Country offices	122	22	23	15	24	17	21
Monitoring and evaluation officers	46 **(38%)**	14 **(64%)**	14 **(61%)**	5 **(33%)**	8 **(33%)**	0 **(0%)**	5 **(24%)**
Monitoring and evaluation focal points	76	8	9	10	16	17	16

B. Financial resources

8. In 2012, the Evaluation Office received funding (through the global budget of the Division for Oversight Services) from: (a) the UNFPA institutional budget; and (b) UNFPA programme resources (global and regional programme). In 2013, the total budget for the Evaluation Office, adjusted for the 2013 actual vacancy rate, was $1.8 million. Of this amount, $1.5 million was funded from the institutional budget and $0.3 million from the global and regional programme and other resources (table 2).[4]

Table 2 - Overview of financial resources, 2012-2013*

Function	2012		2013	
	Vacancy adjusted posts	Vacancy adjusted budget (in millions of $)	Vacancy adjusted posts	Vacancy adjusted budget (in millions of $)
Internal audit	*7 (6+1)*	2.1	*7.7 (6.7+1)*	2.5
Investigation	*4.6 (3.6+1)*	1.2	*5.8 (4.8+1)*	1.3
Division for Oversight Services management and support	*4 (2+2)*	1.0	*4 (2+2)*	1.1
Audit Advisory Committee	-	0.2	-	0.2
Subtotal	**(not comparable)**		***19 (13.5+4)***	**5.1**
Evaluation	***6 (5+1)***	**1.8**	*6 (5+1)*	**1.8**
Total	***21.6 (16.6 +5)***	**6.3**	***23.5 (18.5 +5)***	**6.9**

* The number of professional staff and general service staff, respectively, is indicated in parentheses and italics. Budget figures are from year-end, after adjustments to reflect actual vacancy rates and entitlements.

9. In the absence of a comprehensive budgeted evaluation plan for the period 2012-2013, resource allocation for evaluation in other administrative units is difficult to measure. With regard to the 27 country programme evaluation reports that were managed by country offices (and referred to the Evaluation Office for quality assurance), the total expenditure was $1,286,875. The median value of these evaluations was $46,000, and varied from $4,000 (Democratic Republic of Congo) to $128,000 (Pakistan). The Evaluation Office assessed the quality of both evaluation reports as poor.[5] This illustrates

[4] See the Report of the Director, Division for Oversight Services, on UNFPA internal audit and investigation activities in 2013 - Part III (Resources) (DP/FPA/2014/6).

[5] The detailed evaluation quality assessments for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Pakistan country programme evaluation reports are available in the UNFPA evaluation database at: http://unfpa.org/public/home/about/Evaluation/Database.

that the availability of financial resources is a necessary, yet insufficient, condition to produce high-quality evaluations.

10. Section III provides details of measures that UNFPA undertook in 2012-2013 to improve the quality of evaluation. Variations in financial resources dedicated to evaluation reflect, to some extent, the size of country programmes, the level of the available budget, and the expectations of the evaluation process and learning. The request by the Executive Board that UNFPA prepare a comprehensive, budgeted evaluation plan for corporate and programme-level evaluations for the period 2014-2015 has enabled UNFPA to provide more precise information to the Executive Board, and to establish a baseline to monitor budgets and expenditures in the future.[6]

III. Building evaluation capacity in UNFPA

11. The availability of skilled monitoring and evaluation staff is a key element of the quality and credibility of evaluation, and essential in ensuring that evaluation evidence is well used. During 2012-2013, UNFPA implemented a number of initiatives to improve its evaluation capacity and to set standards for corporate and country programme evaluations.

12. During 2012-2013, the Programme Division organized seven webinars focused on the preparation, use and quality control of programme-level evaluations. The Programme Division also issued guidelines on the evaluation process and conducted a training seminar in Kenya in 2012 for 12 country offices scheduled to evaluate their country programmes.

13. In 2013, the Evaluation Office revised the *Handbook on How to Design and Conduct a Country Programme Evaluation at UNFPA*, to reflect the changes in the revised UNFPA evaluation policy.[7] The updated handbook also took stock of lessons learned from the independent country programme evaluations conducted in 2012-2013 in Madagascar and Lebanon, and the thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health. Feedback provided by monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points was also taken into account in revising the handbook.

14. The Evaluation Office established evaluation quality assurance mechanisms to improve the quality and credibility of UNFPA country programme evaluations, as per paragraph 24(g) of the revised UNFPA evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5). These mechanisms include: (a) approval of all terms of reference for evaluations; (b) pre-qualification of evaluators; and (c) assessment of the quality of final evaluation reports (as per paragraph 29 of the revised evaluation policy). The Evaluation Office will work closely with regional monitoring and evaluation advisers and country offices to operationalize these measures.

15. The Evaluation Office conducted three regional training workshops for 74 participants on the design and management of country programme evaluations in: (a)

[6] In decision 2014/5, the Executive Board adopted the transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2014-2015 (DP/FPA/2014/2), which is available at https://executiveboard.unfpa.org/execDoc.unfpa?method=docDetail&year=2014&sessionType=FRS.

[7] The handbook is available on the Evaluation Office web page at http://unfpa.org/public/cache/offonce/home/about/Evaluation/Methodology.

Africa (June 2012); (b) Asia and the Pacific (November 2013); and (c) Eastern Europe and Central Asia (December 2013). The workshops sought to enhance the capacity of evaluation managers in country offices to design and conduct country programme evaluations, specifically the preparation, design, field, reporting and dissemination phases. The objectives of these workshops were to: (a) identify and explain the roles and responsibilities of evaluation managers at each phase of the evaluation process; (b) familiarize evaluation managers with a number of methodological concepts and tools; and (c) provide guidance on how to perform quality assurance at each stage of the evaluation process. The 2013 workshops also introduced the revised UNFPA evaluation policy and the resulting division of roles and responsibilities within the organization. The updated handbook on designing and conducting country programme evaluations was well received by staff.

16. UNFPA has also strengthened internal evaluation capacity by including evaluation in the UNFPA integrated service desk, to provide coordinated responses to queries and to provide support to field staff on evaluation-related issues.

IV. UNFPA corporate evaluations in 2012-2013

17. In selecting corporate evaluations for the 2013-2013 biennium, the Evaluation Office sought to ensure broad coverage of: (a) UNFPA interventions; (b) areas of strategic relevance or significant investment (for example, maternal health and gender equality); and (c) the potential for replication and/or scaling up (such as the joint programme addressing female genital mutilation and cutting). These thematic evaluations cover organization-wide issues and address five of the seven outcomes of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2008-2013.[8] The selection of countries for the conduct of independent country programme evaluations for 2012-2013 (in the East and Southern Africa region and in the Arab States region)[9] extended the geographical coverage of the Evaluation Office in UNFPA regions not previously covered.

18. During the 2012-2013 biennium, the Evaluation Office completed: (a) a thematic evaluation, in September 2012, of UNFPA support to maternal health, 2000-2011; (b) a joint evaluation, in September 2013, of the UNFPA-United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) joint programme on female genital mutilation and cutting, 2008-2012; and (c) an independent evaluation in November 2012 of the Madagascar country programme, 2008-2013. The evaluation reports and related management responses are publically available through the Evaluation Office web page.[10]

19. The Evaluation Office worked on two other evaluations that are in the final stages of completion, which it will disseminate in 2014. UNFPA participated in the joint

[8] The Evaluation Office evaluated the following outcomes of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2008-2013, in part or in total, in 2011-2013: (a) outcome 2: maternal and newborn health; (b) outcome 3: family planning (the role of family planning in improving maternal health was assessed as part of the thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health, concluded in 2012); (c) outcome 4: prevention services for HIV and sexually transmitted infections; (d) outcome 5: gender equality and reproductive rights; and (e) outcome 6: young people's sexual and reproductive health and sexuality education.

[9] Independent country programme evaluations were conducted in the following regions in 2011: Latin America and the Caribbean (Bolivia, Plurinational State of) and West and Central Africa (Cameroon). The country programme for Turkey (in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region) and the country programme for Bangladesh (in the Asia and the Pacific region) will be evaluated during the 2014-2015 biennium.

[10] All corporate evaluation reports and related management responses are publically available on the Evaluation Office web page at: http://unfpa.org/public/home/about/Evaluation/EBIER.

evaluation of joint gender programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system, which was launched in 2012 under the leadership of the Evaluation Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Five country case studies were undertaken under this evaluation: Albania, Kenya, Liberia, Nicaragua and Palestine. UN-Women will publish case study report summaries in April 2014. The final report will be published in April 2014 and presented at the annual session 2014 of the Executive Board of UN-Women.

20. In 2013, the Evaluation Office conducted an independent evaluation of the third UNFPA country programme in Lebanon, 2010-2014. The Syrian crisis has affected the conduct of the evaluation, which caused delays in the production of the evaluation report. The Evaluation Office will publish the report in May 2014.

A. Thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health, 2000-2011

21. The thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health, 2000-2011[11] revealed that support has been more effective where country offices have based their interventions on a multi-annual strategic vision. This has enabled country offices to exploit synergies among their subprogrammes. The evaluation found that UNFPA, in supporting maternal health, should fully define the operational implications of focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable, particularly to analyse the risks and the barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing maternal health services.

22. The evaluation also highlighted the challenges related to monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the country level, which have limited the capacity of UNFPA to assess the results of its maternal health support and to optimize corporate and country-level maternal health strategies over time. The evaluation showed that UNFPA was an effective knowledge broker of maternal health expertise and that UNFPA has established long-term, proven working partnerships with governments, donors and civil society. The evaluation also indicated that staffing limitations in country offices constrained the achievement of an optimum level of participation in reproductive health policy forums.

23. The evaluation recommended that UNFPA guide country offices in developing medium- to long-term maternal health support strategies, based upon detailed theories of change. The operational implications of targeting the maternal health needs of the most vulnerable should be clearly defined. Key to improving maternal health support is better alignment of the capacity, skills and mix of staff to ensure that country offices effectively fulfil their role as knowledge-brokers. To sustain results and enhance the strategic positioning of UNFPA, the evaluation recommended that UNFPA anchor more firmly the concept of partnerships in strategic documents, operational guidelines and job descriptions to achieve more consistent performance from its partnerships.

[11] The thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health, 2000-2011, is complemented by a midterm evaluation of the contribution of the maternal health thematic fund. See annex 1, available at https://executiveboard.unfpa.org/execDoc.unfpa?method=docDetail&year=2014&sessionType=AS

B. Joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on female genital mutilation and cutting

24. The joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on female genital mutilation and cutting indicated that the programme accelerated existing change processes to abandon female genital mutilation and cutting at national, subnational and community levels; it also contributed to strengthening the momentum for change at the global level. Resources were adequate in the light of the catalytic nature of the programme, yet insufficient to fulfil the needs of programme countries. Lack of the predictability of funds constrained the use of resources. The annual planning, budgeting and reporting cycle hindered operations by limiting the ability of country offices and implementing partners to engage in longer-term implementation. Coordination worked well at the global level and, to a varying degree, at the country level. The evaluation found a persistent data gap related to the transition from changes in social norms to changes in individual and collective behaviour. This, in turn, has prevented a reliable assessment of long-term trends in the prevalence of female genital mutilation and cutting.

25. The evaluation recommended that UNFPA and UNICEF pursue a second phase of the joint programme and maintain the catalytic nature of the joint support. UNFPA and UNICEF should seek to strengthen the commitment and capacity of government authorities at central and decentralized levels and foster local-level commitment, including through non-governmental change agents. UNFPA and UNICEF should test their assumptions of the benefits of cross-community and cross-border dynamics for change, and operationalize them, if confirmed. They should also advocate predictable, longer-term financing, and further strengthen organization-specific and joint systems, tools and capacities to monitor and report on progress towards results. UNFPA and UNICEF should invest more in research on change in social norms and the linkages to changes in individual and collective behaviour.

C. Evaluation of the sixth programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Madagascar

26. The evaluation of the sixth programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Madagascar found that the objectives of the programme had been developed on the basis of a thorough identification of the needs of the Malagasy population and that the programme had been satisfactorily adapted to the new orientations of the United Nations system, following the 2009 political crisis in Madagascar. UNFPA has contributed to improving the availability of maternal health and family planning services. In the area of population and development, UNFPA contributed to developing the capacities of its implementing partners. Strategies for promoting the link between population and development proved less successful. In the area of gender, UNFPA contributed to the establishment of an environment conducive to gender equality.

27. The evaluation recommended a revision of the family planning programme component, using an integrated approach to reproductive health. In the area of population and development, the evaluation recommended that support to the production and use of

demographic and socio-economic data should be accompanied by the resumption of public policy planning by the Government of Madagascar (through its Ministry for Population and Social Affairs), at central and decentralized levels. In the area of gender, the evaluation recommended that UNFPA carry out advocacy initiatives to ensure the operationalization of reforms achieved thus far.

V. UNFPA country programme evaluations

28. Executive Board decision 2009/18[12] requested that UNFPA country programmes be evaluated at least once during their cycle; all programmes due to end in 2011-2012 were therefore subject to evaluation prior to their renewal. The Evaluation Office concentrated its evaluation quality assurance on country programme evaluations.[13] The focus on such evaluations resulted from the desire to gain a better understanding of the gaps and challenges that country offices face in designing and implementing country programme evaluations. This understanding was reflected in the update of the methodology handbook mentioned in paragraph 13. Producing a country programme evaluation methodology; conducting independent country programme evaluations; and ensuring quality assurance are activities of the Evaluation Office that complement one another, and seek to increase the quality and the use of evaluations at UNFPA.

29. As part of its quality assessment work, the Evaluation Office conducted a survey of 27 UNFPA country offices on managing programme-level evaluations in 2012-2013. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of gaps and challenges in the planning, management, resourcing and quality control of the evaluation process, including the role of the regional offices. The survey indicated the following challenges faced by country offices in managing their country programme evaluations: (a) the lack of dedicated monitoring and evaluation staff in a significant proportion of country offices; and (b) the limited availability of evaluators with appropriate expertise in UNFPA policy and programmatic areas.

30. A key challenge reported by country offices is the low, and frequently insufficient, allocation of financial resources for country programme evaluations and the insufficient time allocated for the conduct of these evaluations. The country offices have, however, made progress. The survey indicates a growing awareness of the financial requirements for country programme evaluations. It also indicates an increase in the median budget for evaluations from $35,600 in 2010-2011 to $50,000 in 2012-2013. It shows that more evaluations (48 per cent in 2012-2013 compared to 37 per cent in 2010-2011) were budgeted at the beginning of the programme cycle, with country offices earmarking a portion of the country programme budget for the conduct of a country programme evaluation.

[12] Decision 2009/18, paragraph 8 (f). The revised evaluation policy specifies that country programme evaluations will be conducted at least once in every two programme cycles.

[13] Independent country programme evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office are subject to external quality assessments by the Evaluation Office of another United Nations organization, using UNFPA quality assessment methodology and tools. In 2012, the Evaluation Office of UNICEF assessed the quality of the final report of the independent evaluation of the Madagascar country programme, 2008-2013, and rated it as good.

31. Of the 19 country programme evaluations conducted in 2012-2013, the Evaluation Office performed a quality assessment for 14 of the corresponding final evaluation reports.[14] All country programme evaluations managed by UNFPA country offices are available to the public on a central evaluation database through the Evaluation Office web page.[15] Each evaluation report is presented with its management response and is accompanied by an evaluation quality assessment.

32. In 2012-2013, the Evaluation Office assessed the quality of 27 final reports of programme-level evaluations managed by UNFPA country offices in 2012-2013 (table 3).[16] The assessment indicated an improvement in the quality of programme-level evaluation reports, with five reports rated as good (nearly 20 per cent of all assessed programme-level evaluation reports), compared to the previous quality assessment for the period 2010-2011 (9 per cent).[17] However, 22 reports (81 per cent) of programme-level evaluation reports in 2012-2013 were assessed as being of poor or unsatisfactory quality. This shows a positive change when compared to the 91 per cent assessed as being of poor or unsatisfactory quality in 2010-2011. Nevertheless, the quality of programme-level evaluation reports can be improved.

Table 3 - Quality of country programme evaluation reports in 2012-2013 and 2010-2011

Quality assessment criteria	Years of evaluation: 2012-2013				Years of evaluation: 2010-2011			
	Number of reports				Number of reports			
	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Good	Very good	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Good	Very good
Structure and clarity of reporting	1	15	10	1	2	22	10	0
Executive summary	3	13	10	1	7	18	8	1
Design and methodology	4	11	11	1	7	19	7	1
Reliability of data	3	18	6	0	5	21	8	0
Findings and analysis	3	19	5	0	8	23	3	0
Conclusions	2	20	5	0	15	16	3	0
Recommendations	2	18	7	0	5	23	6	0
Meeting needs	2	7	16	2	6	19	9	0
Overall results	**3 (11%)**	**19 (70%)**	**5 (19%)**	**0 (0%)**	**8 (23%)**	**23 (68%)**	**3 (9%)**	**0 (0%)**

[14] The Evaluation Office received five final evaluation reports after the quality assessment process had been completed in 2013. The Evaluation Office will conduct quality assessments of these reports in 2014. Note that the 2012-2013 quality assessment also included 13 reports of country programme evaluations conducted in 2011, but not received by the Evaluation Office until 2012. Therefore, the number of reports that the Evaluation Office assessed for quality in 2012-2013 was 27.

[15] See http://unfpa.org/public/home/about/Evaluation/Database.

[16] All programme-level evaluations submitted for an evaluation quality assessment in 2012-2013 consisted of country programme evaluations commissioned and managed by country offices. Also see annex 3 at https://executiveboard.unfpa.org/execDoc.unfpa?method=docDetail&year=2014&sessionType=AS.

[17] This is presented in the 2012 evaluation quality assessment report, available at http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/Evaluation_branch/Quality%20Assurance/2012%20EQA%20report%20FINAL.pdf. The smaller cohort of evaluations in 2012-2013 (27 reports), compared to 2010-2011 (34 reports), limits a direct comparison of results.

33. Some elements of evaluation practice show improvement.[18] Sixty-seven per cent of evaluation reports from 2012-2013 were assessed as having met the needs stated in their terms of reference. Design and methodology were also rated highly, with 12 reports rated as very good or good (44 per cent). The ratings for both these criteria have increased compared to 2010-2011. This indicates an improvement in the methodological approach presented in country programme evaluations, as well as in the manner in which evaluation teams responded to the requirements specified in the terms of reference.

34. The quality of findings, analyses and conclusions, however, is of concern. Twenty-two programme-level evaluation reports in 2012-2013 were assessed as poor or unsatisfactory (81 per cent) compared to 2010-2011 (91 per cent). This indicates that country programme evaluations lack sound and rigorous analytical work, which results in: (a) insufficiently substantiated findings; (b) poor formulation of conclusions; and (c) limited usefulness of recommendations. Improving the quality of country programme evaluations so they can be used with confidence by UNFPA country offices to inform future strategy and programming is a priority for the Evaluation Office, in collaboration with the UNFPA regional offices.

35. Taking stock of the results of the quality assessment conducted in 2012-2013, the Evaluation Office has made the improvement in the quality of country programme evaluations managed by country offices a priority, to ensure that these evaluations contribute better to organizational learning and accountability.

VI. Evaluation use and learning

36. One of the main purposes of an evaluation function is to ensure the effective use of evaluation evidence to improve organizational performance and learning. A number of factors must be in place for this to occur: (a) the relevance and timeliness of evaluations; (b) the quality and credibility of evaluations; (c) clear and transparent mechanisms to respond to evaluation findings and recommendations; and (d) effective dissemination strategies to contribute to learning by key stakeholders and development partners. The norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations system[19] call for an explicit response by governing authorities and management addressed by evaluation recommendations, as well as an appropriate follow-up mechanism to ensure that recommendations are implemented in a timely manner and are used for programming. In 2012-2013, UNFPA sought to improve evaluation use and learning in a number of ways.

37. With the adoption of the revised UNFPA evaluation policy and the division of responsibilities, the Executive Director ensures effective management responses and follow-up to all UNFPA evaluations.[20] UNFPA has therefore refocused the evaluation-related activities of the Programme Division on the promotion of evaluation use and the dissemination of evaluation evidence. The Programme Division is responsible for

[18] The UNFPA quality assessment methodology consists of eight quality criteria and four levels; see the evaluation quality assessment explanatory note at: http://web2.unfpa.org/public/about/oversight/evaluations/templates.unfpa.

[19] United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards are available at: http://www.uneval.org/normsandstandards/index.jsp?doc_cat_source_id=4. See norm 12 and standard 1.4.

[20] See paragraph 22 of the revised UNFPA evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5); paragraph 36 calls for the Executive Director to report regularly to the Executive Board on the use and follow-up of evaluations, including on the implementation of recommendations.

coordinating management responses to corporate evaluations, and for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of corporate and programme-level evaluations.[21] The Division has established a management response tracking system, which has resulted in improved management responses for programme-level evaluations.[22] All country programme evaluations undertaken by country offices in 2012-2013 have a publicly-available management response.[23]

38. Monitoring the use and follow-up of evaluation results (i.e., ensuring that recommendations and lessons learned feed into programming, and identifying and sharing good practices) is key to organizational learning. The Programme Division is responsible for developing and implementing systems to monitor and report on evaluation follow-up, and for ensuring that the evaluation recommendations are implemented and integrated into strategic policy, planning and decision-making at the global level. Based on self-reported data collated by Programme Division from country office annual reports, it appears that 90 per cent of recommendations due in 2012-2013 have been implemented. A priority for UNFPA in 2014-2015 will be the development of a more transparent mechanism for monitoring and reporting evaluation follow-up.

39. In 2012-2013, the Evaluation Office promoted the use of the results of corporate evaluations through: (a) evaluation briefs in English, French and Spanish; (b) field case studies; and (c) evaluation reports. The Evaluation Office distributed the briefs, case studies and reports to internal and external stakeholders and made them publicly available on the Evaluation Office web page. The Evaluation Office organized post-evaluation learning and dissemination events that included: (a) stakeholder workshops; (b) three webinars that targeted UNFPA programme and technical staff in headquarters and in decentralized units;[24] (c) detailed briefings to Executive Board members during informal sessions; (d) regular presentations to the Audit Advisory Committee; and (e) presentations at international conferences.

40. As UNFPA develops a body of high-quality evaluation reports, the Evaluation Office will synthesize and analyse the evidence contained in the reports. The Evaluation Office will summarize and present the lessons learned from UNFPA country programme evaluations during 2011-2014 in its annual report for 2014, which the Evaluation Office will present to the Executive Board at its annual session 2015.

VII. UNFPA evaluation partnerships

[21] The Programme Division coordinates the preparation of management responses to all corporate evaluations, tracks and reports on the completion of management responses and the implementation of recommendations of corporate and programme-level evaluations, and supports, monitors and reports on follow-up action to ensure that the evaluation recommendations are implemented and integrated into strategic policy, planning and decision-making at the global level. See the annex on the overview of the roles and responsibilities in evaluation at UNFPA, in the revised UNFPA evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5).

[22] With regard to corporate evaluations, the practice in the Evaluation Office has been to accompany final reports with a detailed, published management response.

[23] All evaluation reports and their related management responses are publically available through the central evaluation database at: http://unfpa.org/public/home/about/Evaluation/Database.

[24] These webinars disseminated the results of: (a) the Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Cameroon independent country programme evaluations (April 2012); (b) the thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health and the contribution of the Maternal Health Thematic Fund (November 2012); and (c) the joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on female genital mutilation and cutting (November 2013).

41. Strong national evaluation capacities play a key role in promoting development effectiveness. Strengthening national capacities in evaluation is a priority for UNFPA. The Evaluation Office considers that this can be best addressed by working through effective partnerships with national partners in corporate- and programme-level evaluations. UNFPA also works in partnership with other United Nations organizations to promote more effective evaluation efforts.

A. Working with national partners

42. UNFPA seeks to adopt partnership approaches to evaluation, with an emphasis on improving the capacity of partners to use evaluation results. Representatives from partner governments, other partners, and representatives from civil society organizations play a key role in evaluation governance, including participation in evaluation reference groups. Their participation in reference groups serves to: (a) strengthen evaluation approaches; (b) broaden support for evaluation learning; and (c) enhance the capacity to use the results of evaluations in guiding policy and programming.

B. United Nations Evaluation Group

43. The Evaluation Office has contributed to the substantive activities of the United Nations Evaluation Group through the task forces of the Group. The Evaluation Office participated in the annual evaluation practice exchange seminar in New York in 2013. It also led a workshop on managing evaluations to share information and experiences on evaluation approaches and methodologies and to facilitate peer-learning among United Nations organizations.

44. The workshop focused on key challenges identified by United Nations organizations in: (a) the formation of evaluation teams; (b) participation by national stakeholders; (c) ethics and code of conduct for the field phase; and (d) quality assurance systems and tools. The evaluation offices of UNDP, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and UN-Women co-facilitated the session. The participants identified good practices and presented recommendations to the 2013 annual general meeting of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

C. United Nations system-wide action plan for gender equality

45. The United Nations system-wide action plan for implementation of the policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination is a common set of measures to enable the United Nations system to assess progress in its gender-related work, including accountability and internal capacity. The Chief Executives Board for Coordination approved the system-wide action plan in April 2012. United Nations entities are expected to meet United Nations system-wide action plan performance standards by 2017.

46. Evaluation is one of the 14 organization-wide performance indicators in the action plan. The Evaluation Office participated in piloting the system-wide action plan on

gender equality and the empowerment of women in UNFPA in 2013. The Evaluation Office also participated in the human rights and gender equality task force of the United Nations Evaluation Group and helped to develop a scorecard for the evaluation performance indicator. The first year of reporting on the United Nations system-wide action plan will be 2014.

VIII. UNFPA evaluation: a period of transition

47. The previous biennial report on evaluation (DP/FPA/2012/8) highlighted a number of gaps in evaluation at UNFPA. It called for a reassessment of the role of the evaluation function to realize its full potential in generating evaluative knowledge for organizational learning and managing for results, as well as to support accountability. Since September 2010, the Evaluation Office has sought to strengthen the approach to evaluation at UNFPA; a number of initiatives undertaken by the Office have been formalized through the adoption by the Executive Board, in June 2013, of the revised evaluation policy. The policy further aligns the UNFPA evaluation function with the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.[25]

48. The evaluation function is now independent from other management functions, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities between the independent Evaluation Office, regional and country offices, and other units in headquarters.

49. The Evaluation Office prepared a detailed budgeted evaluation plan for the 2014-2015 biennium (DP/FPA/2014/2). The plan is in accordance with United Nations Evaluation Group standards, which call for the planning of evaluations to be an explicit part of planning and budgeting of the evaluation function and the organization as a whole. In decision 2014/5, the Executive Board approved the transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan.[26] The purpose of planning evaluations is to: (a) demonstrate accountability to stakeholders; (b) support evidence-based decision-making; and (c) contribute important lessons learned to policies, programmes and interventions.

IX. Looking forward: challenges and prospects for evaluation at UNFPA

50. The 2014-2015 programme of work of the Evaluation Office is based on the transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan that the Executive Board approved in January 2014, and is funded through the resources allocated to evaluation, as incorporated in the UNFPA integrated budget estimates, 2014-2017 (DP/FPA/2013/14). The 2014-2015 programme of work includes three thematic evaluations and two independent country programme evaluations: (a) UNFPA support to adolescents and youth, 2008-2013; (b) UNFPA support to data availability to inform decision-making and policy formulation, 2008-2013; (c) UNFPA support to the availability of quality family

[25] United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards: see footnote 19.
[26] The transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2014-2015 (DP/FPA/2014/2) is available at https://executiveboard.unfpa.org/execDoc.unfpa?method=docDetail&year=2014&sessionType=FRS.

planning services, 2008-2014; (d) the fifth UNFPA country programme in Turkey, 2011-2015; and (e) the eighth UNFPA country programme in Bangladesh, 2012-2016.

51. The Evaluation Office selected these evaluations on the basis of criteria contained in the revised UNFPA evaluation policy and on the basis of wide consultations, to ensure that the topics selected were relevant and met the needs of the organization. Country offices will manage 21 country programme evaluations in 2014, and 14 in 2015 (see table 4). In 2015, the Eastern Europe and Central Asia regional office will undertake a thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to strengthen family planning commodity security in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries, 2008-2014.

Table 4 - Decentralized evaluations, 2014-2015

	UNFPA global	East and Southern Africa	West and Central Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Eastern Europe and Central Asia	Latin America and the Caribbean
Country offices	122	22	23	15	24	17	21
Country programme evaluations planned in 2014-2015	35	4	4	4	9	5	9

52. The transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2014-2015, shows an increased investment in evaluations by UNFPA, and greater transparency in relation to evaluation planning. Yet this is only a part of the picture. The present report has identified a number of issues that require attention as the new evaluation policy is operationalized.

53. The Evaluation Office will continue its efforts to improve the quality, credibility and utilization of UNFPA evaluations. Closely related to this is the need to build capacity and professionalize the evaluation function in UNFPA. The Evaluation Office will work closely with regional directors and regional monitoring and evaluation officers to operationalize the new policy and extend the coverage of quality assurance and support to country offices.

54. Building and sustaining a strong evaluation function at UNFPA is a work in progress. It requires continuous attention, resources and commitment from management and staff in the organization, as well as from the Executive Board. The revised UNFPA evaluation policy has created the conditions to bring about positive change. The challenge in the next two years is to ensure that UNFPA develops a body of high-quality evaluations that will enhance learning and generate knowledge, strengthen accountability, and improve UNFPA performance.

X. Elements of a decision

55. **The Executive Board may wish to:**

(a) Take note of the present report (DP/FPA/2014/7);

(b) Express its continuing support for strengthening the evaluation function at UNFPA;

(c) Request UNFPA to report on progress in addressing key issues and challenges in evaluation in the annual report on evaluation to the Executive Board.